JAMJIE'S TRAVEL GUIDE

A Travel System for DMs

A wild, untamed world surrounds the settlements of civilization.
Lead your travelers through the adventure before the destination.

A CORE RULES SET FOR TRAVEL IN 5TH EDITION DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

J M Gunnarsson

Jamjie's Travel Guide

A Travel System for DMs

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Introduction

"It is good to have an end to journey toward but it is the journey that matters in the end." These words are never truer than in the vast worlds of Dungeons & Dragons! The official rules provide a myriad of options for engaging with the world during an exciting and dangerous voyage between cities or to distant foreign lands. However, many DMs struggle to apply these rules and tools in a manner that is engaging and intuitive for players.

DMs often choose to bypass travel adventures altogether in favor of a quick narrative bridge summarizing days of travel. And that's perfectly fine! However, doing so can often stifle not just the opportunity for fun and engaging gameplay, but also several useful class features that can make players feel like avid, capable adventurers while on the road. The ranger's Favored Enemy and Natural Explorer feats, for example, can provide significant benefits to the entire party while navigating, foraging, and tracking; or a druid's *goodberry* and *create or destroy water* spells can help sustain a party running low on food and water. For parties including these types of classes or spellcasters, a DM may want to consider working more engaging travel experiences into their campaigns in order to allow these players to contribute just as much as the clerics, wizards, and barbarians.

I hope this system of rules will provide you and your players with as much fun, epic travel as they have for me and my parties. Please reach out to me on Reddit (/u/fifthstringdm) or by e-mail (jeffrey.gunnarsson@gmail.com) with any feedback, thoughts, or comments. Happy travels!

— J M Gunnarsson
December 2018

A note on inspiration…

I drew inspiration for these rules of travel from the December 2016 article "Getting There is Half the Fun" by The Angry GM (www.theangrygm.com). Angry does an incredible job outlining why the rules as written and the typical conventions for travel leave much to be desired. He then not only outlines a basic system for making travel interesting, but goes further in explaining exactly *why* those elements are interesting. I felt that I could modify, expand, and improve these rules to mesh more easily with 5e and provide a more concretely-defined rule set for other DMs to enjoy.

Angry, your expertise has been an invaluable resource for me and certainly countless other GMs. If you ever take it upon yourself to mention this piece of work in one of your articles and eviscerate me for all the mistakes, shortcomings, and sheer idiocy that no doubt riddle its pages, it would be the greatest honor of my DMing career so far. Thank you for everything.

Table of Contents

Introduction **3**

Table of Contents **4**

Travel Overview **5**

Speed and Distance 5

Routes and Options 6

Encumbrance 8

The Travel Day **9**

Weather 9

Pace 9

Encounters 10

Discoveries 11

Foraging 12

Navigation 13

Sleep 14

Travel Overview

Adventure awaits on the open road! Dungeons & Dragons provides the tools to make travel a bold and daring adventure all on its own, and this rule set is written to put those tools together into a cohesive framework for narrating days of travel.

While traveling, adventurers must make wise choices about how much food to take with them, what pace to set, whether to explore and discover or to always stay the course. They must forage for food and water or face the harrowing exhaustion of the natural elements.

As the Dungeon Master, you will narrate the party's journey day by day, watching as a simple excursion between points of interest suddenly becomes an engaging challenge for the entire party.

Speed and Distance

Speed, time, and distance are all measured in days. While this approach may seem confusing, ultimately it results in less math and a more intuitive reckoning of pace and timing during a long journey. It also allows the players to more directly comprehend the journey ahead: An NPC may advise them that "the route from Neverwinter to Phandalin is a four days' journey down the coast and inland along the Triboar Trail." Such a description is more meaningful than telling the players that the journey is 100 miles.

Of course, if the party chooses to move more quickly on their journey, they will cover more ground. By setting a fast pace, they could cover this four days' journey in only three days' time. Similarly, if on the way they decide to pursue some tantalizing clues toward a discovery off the main road, they will lose some time without gaining distance along their journey. In this case, it may take five days of travel to cover the four days' journey to Phandalin.

In general, time and distance are reckoned in increments of 1/3. At a normal pace, the party covers 1 day of distance in 1 day of travel time. At a fast pace, they cover an additional 1/3: In 3 days of travel, they cover the full 4 days of distance.

In addition, bonuses and penalties to speed and distance are handled in increments of 1/3. When distracted by an encounter or discovery, they will lose 1/3 of a day's distance. These penalties are additive rather than multiplicative, allowing the DM to combine the party's pace, navigation skills, encounters, and the weather around them easily at the end of the day.

Routes and Options

Travel becomes most engaging when the party can make impactful choices based on weighing meaningful tradeoffs, and then see the consequences of those choices unfold. Should they slow down to forage for food more easily or hurry up and get to the next town before their rations run out? Should they take the long, safe route around the mountains or the short but treacherous route straight through? Should they hunker down for the day and weather the storm or press on at the risk of becoming exhausted and getting hopelessly lost?

Most fundamental to this suite of choices is the route itself. Before embarking on any long voyage, the party should have access to at least two or three different options for how to get to its destination, with meaningful tradeoffs for each choice.

Each potential route should have the following scores assigned to it. These values are explained in the following subsections.

- **Length.** The length of the route in travel days at a normal pace.
- **Danger.** Score between 1 and 5 indicating how dangerous the route is.
- **Discovery.** Wisdom (Perception) DC representing opportunities for discoveries.
- **Resources.** Wisdom (Survival) DC determining how easy it is to forage.
- **Navigation.** Wisdom (Survival) DC based on the difficulty of following the route.

You do not need to show this information directly to the players but they should understand the nature of each route. For example, an NPC in town might tell them, "The old miner's trail is the safest path to the temple on Mount Iris. But if you're in a hurry, you can ascend the mountain directly. Be careful, though—the area is frequently patrolled by orcs."

Length

For travelers setting a normal pace without distractions and in decent weather, a given route should take some nominal number of days. You can base these distances on an established world map or simply imagine what they might be given the nature of the routes.

In general, safe routes should tend to be longer and easier to navigate, whereas faster routes should offer more perils (but potentially more opportunities for exploration!).

If translating travel days from an existing map, use the conversion of **1 day = 24 miles**.

Although these rules are meant to make any long journey interesting, they work best with distances of between 3 and 10 days.

Danger

Assign the route a danger score between 1 and 5. This number will represent the number of random encounter rolls the party will make in a travel day.

- **1.** Generally safe and civilized areas.
- **2.** Typical untamed wild between settlements.
- **3.** Regions crawling with enemies or monsters.
- **4.** Exceptionally dangerous or actively patrolled territory of enemies or evil creatures.
- **5.** Hellish, otherworldly environments, such as the undead-infested Shadowfell or the most treacherous regions of the Elemental Planes.

Discovery

Well-traveled routes are safe but offer little in the way of interesting distractions and discoveries. Parties with a penchant for exploration may favor routes that are more treacherous or unknown, which can offer much more tantalizing opportunities for wonder and discovery.

To represent the likelihood of making a discovery each day, assign the route a Wisdom (Perception) DC.

- **25.** Well-traveled roads
- **20.** Alternate paths or difficult passages
- **15.** Secret, abandoned, or uncharted routes

Resources

Different environments may offer more opportunities for foraging food and water, easing the burden of travelers who would otherwise have to carry heavy stockpiles of food and water over long distances. Unfortunately, the easiest routes and roads are often the most difficult to forage, since they are frequently populated with other travelers or civilized inhabitants who have already depleted, hunted, or cultivated the natural resources.

Choose a Wisdom (Survival) DC for the ease with which players can forage along a route.

- **5-10.** Forests, meadows, and other adundant natural environments
- **15-20.** Well-traveled routes and areas near farms and civilization
- **25-30.** Deserts, tundras, or other barren natural areas

Navigation

Any long journey relies on the skills and wits of a good navigator to keep the adventurers on track. Some routes are more difficult to navigate than others, however, depending on the presence of roads and natural landmarks or on the party's knowledge from a map or NPC.

Assign a Wisdom (Survival) DC to the route based on its ease of navigability.

- **0 or N/A.** Routes along well-traveled roads do not require an ability check.
- **5-10.** Rolling flatlands with plenty of distinct recognizable landmarks
- **15-20.** Uncharted or difficult territory
- **25-30.** Deserts or vast featureless landscapes

Example routes

The following examples use different combinations of the above scores to create unique routes for the party to choose from. Presenting multiple routes to the same destination allows the party to make strategic choices about the journey ahead.

The High Road

The safest way to get from Neverwinter to Conyberry is to follow the High Road south along the Sword Coast, then head inland along the Triboar Trail. The route is safe and easy to navigate, but offers little opportunity for foraging and discovery.

Length: 5 days
Danger: 1
Discovery: DC25
Resources: DC20
Navigation: n/a

Forest's edge

Travelers can hasten their journey by abandoning the road in favor of following the river to the ruins of Thundertree and then following along the edge of the forest. This route offers access to the bounty of Neverwinter Wood while avoiding hostile goblin territory.

Length: 4 days
Danger: 2
Discovery: DC20
Resources: DC15
Navigation: DC10

Neverwinter Wood

The fastest way to Conyberry is along the river to the ruins of Thundertree and then directly through the Neverwinter Wood. The vast forest offers all kinds of secrets and a bounty of natural resources, but is difficult to navigate and fraught with danger, including several hostile goblin tribes.

Length: 3 days
Danger: 3
Discovery: DC15
Resources: DC10
Navigation: DC15

Encumbrance

Many DMs choose not to enforce the encumbrance rules described in the Player's Handboook, as it can be an exercise in tedium to account for everything the players are carrying. However, managing encumbrance provides a crucial element of engaging travel, presenting the players with the critical question: What do we take with us? Supplies like tents and bedrolls can help adventurers sleep better and avoid becoming exhausted. Rations and extra water keep the players well-fed when foraging opportunities are scarce.

If the players can simply carry as many supplies and rations as they want, some of these decisions become irrelevant. Even bigger challenges and endeavors, such as acquiring mounts to carry supplies on long journeys, become meaningless unless encumbrance is enforced.

Therefore, this section provides some simple methods and suggestions for handling encumbrance.

Rules as Written

Page 176 of the Player's Handbook provides a maximum carrying capacity in pounds of 15 times a character's Strength score. The "Variant: Encumbrance" section provides additional constraints at 5 times (speed reduced by 10 feet) and 10 times (speed reduced by 20 feet, disadvantage on certain rolls) the character's Strength score.

For this travel system, the recommendation is to use the rules in the Player's Handbook, including the "Variant: Encumbrance" option.

Tracking Encumbrance

Keeping track of encumbrance can be simplified by ignoring light items (arrows, parchment and pens, small trinkets) and focusing only on weighty items (tents, rations and water, armor and weapons).

Alternatively, you may enforce a lower limit on supplies related to travel. For example, a player may only carry a weight of rations and water equal to their character's Strength score in pounds. (This works out to 2 days' worth of food and water for a character with a Strength score of 14).

Perhaps the most effective method of tracking encumbrance is allowing the players to do it themselves by giving them sheets of paper with columns of items and their weights, allowing them to easily index and sum the weight of everything they are carrying. The Reddit user /u/AlphaPrism873 created an alternate character sheet format that includes such an inventory. These sheets still use the Wizards of the Coast aesthetic and provide a number of other improvements over the official versions.

Weight of Travel Supplies

For reference, a collection of common travel-related supplies is summarized in the table below along with their weights and cost from the Player's Handbook.

Travel Supplies

Item	Cost	Weight
Rations (1 day)	5 sp	2 lb.
Waterskin	2 sp	5 lb. (full)
Tent, two-person	2 gp	20 lb.
Bedroll	1 gp	7 lb.
Blanket	5 sp	3 lb.
Mess kit	2 sp	1 lb.
Barrel	2 gp	70 lb. (empty) 390 lb. (full of liquid)

Of these supplies, the rations and water are consumable. One day's worth of rations weighs 2 pounds, while a full waterskin weighs 5 pounds. A normal person needs to consume about half a gallon of water a day, or 4 pounds. (The remaining 1 pound is the weight of the empty waterskin.) This means that a day's worth of food and water (including the waterskin) weighs 7 pounds.

The Travel Day

Each section below explains an element of a travel day. Each day of travel cycles through each element, and they are presented chronologically: from the weather in the morning, to the encounters and exploration of the day, to the well-earned sleep of the night. The DM should resolve each element while narrating the day's travel, allowing the party to make decisions based on each element before proceeding to the next.

Weather

Never is a party more at the mercy of the elements than when on the road. Heavy rains or howling winds can easily dictate the pace and fate of a day of travel. Each morning of a travel day, roll a d20. On a result of 1, extreme weather results. The type is dependent on the season. Use the following tables to roll for a type of extreme weather.

Extreme Weather: Spring & Summer

d4	Extreme Weather
1	Gale force winds
2	Thunderstorm
3	Flash flooding
4	Heat wave

Extreme Weather: Fall & Winter

d4	Extreme Weather
1	Blizzard
2	Freezing rain
3	Ice storm
4	Cold snap

Extreme weather results in the following effects:

- **Poor sleep.** The Constitution saving throw DC for sleep increases by 5.
- **Slow travel.** Travel speed is reduced by 1/3.
- **Difficult navigation.** The day's navigation check is made with disadvantage.

See the subsequent sections for how these effects should be applied.

Pace

Once the party is awake and ready to set out, they should choose a travel pace for the day. The party might make this decision depending on the weather, their schedule, or their food supply, and the pace they choose impacts factors like the likelihood of surprise encounters and the distance covered in a travel day.

Normal Pace

At a normal pace, the party covers 1 day of distance per day of travel (24 miles per day).

Slow Pace

The party may choose to reduce their travel speed to a slow pace, meaning they only cover 2 days of distance per 3 days of travel (16 miles per day). In doing so, they gain the following benefits:

- **Stealth opportunity.** When approaching an encounter, the party will notice any other creatures first, and can choose to use stealth to engage or bypass them.
- **Time to forage.** Due to the leisurely pace, each player has advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to forage for food and water.

Fast Pace

If time is of the essence, the party may choose to move at a fast pace, allowing them to cover 4 days of distance per 3 days of travel (32 miles per day). However, they suffer the following penalties for their haste:

- **Reduced perception.** Each player's passive Wisdom (Perception) score suffers a -5 penalty.
- **Reduced forage time.** Due to the rushed pace, each player has disadvantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to forage for food and water.

Encounters

Every journey brings with it the risk of dangerous encounters with greedy bandits and hungry monsters, as well as perilous natural obstacles, or even just tense social interactions with traveling strangers.

Each day, have the party roll a number of d4 dice equal to the danger score for the route (see the Routes and Options section). For each result of 1, give the party a random encounter. You can come up with your own or roll on the table at right.

One way to make encounters more engaging is to make later encounters related to the players' actions in earlier ones. For example, they might talk down a band of orcs from a fight, only to find that a later encounter results in an ambush from a larger band of orcs.

Random Encounters

d6	Encounter
1	A narrow passage along a windy cliff requires a DC10 Dexterity check to skirt across and avoid a 30-foot fall, or an additional 1/3 day to find a way around.
2	A hungry **ettin** stumbles down from a mountain onto the party's path.
3	A band of 1d6+1 **orcs** accuses the party of trespassing, demanding a ransom in exchange for safe passage.
4	A trio of shadowy figures on the road vanishes into the forest upon seeing the party.
5	A lone halfling lies unconscious on the trail, his possessions scattered.
6	The party steps on a nest of eggs defended by a pair of **giant eagles**.

Discoveries

Exploration is a cornerstone of D&D. One of the most captivating elements of travel through uncharted regions is the possibility of exploration leading to a useful or interesting discovery.

Discoveries can take a number of forms. Roll on the table at right to determine a random discovery.

In order to make discoveries particularly engaging, they should not be shown to the party directly. Instead, show them a sign, a clue, or some unusual observation that they can choose to pursue or not. For example, they might see a column of dark smoke above the trees a few miles off the trail, or a spattering of fresh blood crossing their path, or some hidden runic text scrawled across an old monument beside the road. The players can then choose whether to pursue a lead (costing time but potentially leading to an interesting discovery) or to ignore the lead and stay the course.

Each day, have the most perceptive member of the party make a Wisdom (Perception) check against the discovery DC for the route (see the Routes and Options section). On a success, describe a discovery lead that the players may pursue. On a failure, the party notices nothing out of the ordinary for the day.

If the party pursues the lead to make the discovery, subtract 1/3 of a day's distance from their progress for the day.

Random Discoveries

d6	Discovery
1	A lone half-orc living in a cabin who is wary of intruders but also willing to trade for supplies
2	A small cave with runic inscriptions describing the location of treasure
3	Sound of hammering leading to a dwarf touching up an ancient stone monument
4	A hidden trail marked by broken branches leading to a hidden cache of weapons and supplies
5	The dropped diary of another adventurer describing a hidden locale
6	An abandoned camp with footprints leading into the woods and a bag of jewels lying by the fire pit

Foraging

Adventurers must eat and drink each day to stay energized on long voyages. The party may bring along a stockpile of rations and water, or they may rely on the bounty of their environment to feed them; most rely on a bit of both.

Each day, have every member of the party make a Wisdom (Survival) check against the DC for resources (see the Routes and Options section) to forage for food. Each character that is successful finds enough food to eat for the day. Each character that fails must consume a days' worth of rations from the party's food supply.

Water sources

Each character requires half a gallon of water (one full waterskin) per day. If even one player forages successfully, then they find a spring or water source that all party members can share to drink their fill for the day and refill their waterskins or other water containers. However, if all party members fail to forage, then there is no water source and each character must consume water from their waterskin or the party's reserve supply.

A waterskin carries half a gallon of water, weighing 5 pounds when full. In general, water weighs 8 pounds per gallon (so a 70-pound barrel full of 40 gallons of water weighs 390 pounds). The party might choose to carry extra water, but its weight makes it a significant burden.

Starvation and thirst

If a character finds no food and the party has no rations on hand, they might still be able to push on for a few days despite their hunger. The player must make a DC20 Constitution saving throw for the day. On a failure, the character gains one level of exhaustion.

Water, on the other hand, is essential and no character can go much more than a day without it. If the party finds no water and has none on hand for a character to drink, the character automatically gains one level of exhaustion.

Sleeping while hungry

When a character has either not eaten or not had water on a given day, then they cannot gain the ordinary benefit of reducing their exhaustion by sleeping.

Alternate food sources

Some players might get creative when food supplies are low, such as by suggesting that the party cook and eat the meat of monsters killed in random encounters. These creative solutions should be not only allowed but encouraged! If the players are looking for creative solutions, then they clearly see the problems you are presenting them with as legitimate threats that need to be addressed, meaning you as the DM have done your job.

Navigation

Navigating the untamed wilderness requires a skilled navigator. The party should designate one of its members as the navigator. Have this player make a Wisdom (Survival) check each day against the DC for the route. On a success, the party navigates the route for the day, adding the day's travel to their total. On a failure, the party has become lost, making no progress for the day. If the check result fails by 5 or more, the party has gotten turned around, and the day's travel is subtracted from the total progress.

As an example, suppose the party is traveling a route that normally takes 5 days to traverse and has already traveled 3 days' worth of that distance. If they are moving at a fast pace and get lost, then by the end of the day their total progress will still be at 3 days, or if turned around their progress will be reduced by 1⅓ day to 1⅔ total days' worth of progress.

Smarter navigation

Players may find ways to navigate routes better, such as by asking a knowledgeable NPC for directions before leaving or by purchasing a map of the area. If the party takes measures to reasonably increase their ability to navigate, allow the navigator to make the Wisdom (Survival) check with advantage each day.

Tracking

Sometimes, the party may not have a known or fixed destination, but instead may be following a target by tracking it each day. In such a scenario, use the same rules as ordinary navigation above, but on each check failure, increase the Wisdom (Survival) DC for subsequent days by 2 to represent the trail going cold while the party is lost. In addition, be sure to apply any normal benefits of tracking that spells such as *hunter's mark* provide.

Extreme weather

A blizzard can severely limit visibility or heavy rains can flood sections of the trail and force alternate routes. On days with extreme weather, the Wisdom (Survival) check for navigation is made with disadvantage.

Pressing On

During a normal day, a party spends about 8 hours traveling. At the end of the day, the party may decide to press on for an additional 2 hours before resting. If they choose to do so, they gain an additional 1/3 day of distance to their total progress. However, each player must succeed on a DC12 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion.

This decision can be made after the navigation check for the day. No second check is necessary even if the party decides to press on.

Sleep

Every day of adventure and travel deserves a good night's rest. However, the road and the outdoors create a rugged environment that can take a wearying toll on adventurers who lack the vigor to withstand the elements.

Every evening after a day's travel, have each player make a DC12 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the player's character suffers one level of exhaustion due to a poor night's sleep. On a success, if the character has consumed food and water that day, the character loses one level of exhaustion (if applicable). If they have not consumed food or water, then they neither lose nor gain a level of exhaustion on a successful saving throw.

Regardless of the result of this Constitution saving throw, the player otherwise gains all the normal benefits of a long rest, such as recovering spell slots and hit points.

Despite the rigors of sleeping in an outdoor camp at the mercy of the elements, wise travelers know they can achieve a better night's sleep with the proper supplies. Conversely, certain conditions can make it more difficult to rest. Apply the following modifiers to the DC of the Constitution saving throw whenever applicable.

- **Tent.** Sleeping in a tent reduces the DC by 5.
- **Bedroll.** The comfort of a bedroll reduces the DC by 2.
- **Blanket.** In cold weather, a blanket reduces the DC by 1. In warm weather, a blanket provides no benefit.
- **Extreme weather.** During extreme weather (see Weather section), the DC increases by 5.